Overcharging by Haj Panel

2340. SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to a news item published under the captions "Haj Panel overcharging, claims pilgrims' appearing in the Times of India of 2nd February, 2000;

(b) if so, the details in this regard; and

(c) what action is proposed to be taken in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) Yes Sir.

(b) and (c) The news-item in question relates to the case filed against Central Haj Committee, Mumbai, in November, 1997 before the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission. The case is subjudice. The Central Haj Committee charges the pilgrims the actual costs of various services provided. In cases where the accommodation provided to the pilgrims is of lower category than what has been paid for, then the difference in charges is reimbursed to the pilgrim on return to India.

Terrorist training camps in POK, Pakistan and Afghanistan

2341. SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether terrorists in Kashmir are directly confronting army by attacking them at their Head Quarters;

(b) whether it is a fact that American official sources have confirmed Bin Laden's involvement in terrorist activities in Kashmir;

(c) whether, it is also a fact that terrorist training camps are established in Pak occupied Kashmir, Pakistan and Afghanistan;

(d) whether international law permits attack on such hostile camps;

(e) if so, whether Government have any plans of dislodging such camps by using force or at least warning the concerned Governments for a strong action against them; and

(f) if so, details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) Yes, Sir. Several suicide attacks

were undertaken on Army and BSF camps in Jammu & Kashmir from November-December 1999 onwards.

(b) and (c) The US authorities are aware of the links between Osama Bin Laden and Pakistan-based terrorist groups. Testifying before a US Congressional Committee in Washington on 2 February 2000 the Director of Central Intelligence Agengy confirmed to the American Congressional Committee that Osama Bin Laden was providing substantial support to extremist groups operating in Jammu & Kashmir. Government are aware that in addition to Pakistan, training camps of these groups have been established in Pakistan occupied Kashmir and Afghanistan.

(d) and (f) International law provides for the right to legitimate self-defence. Government have been appropriately and effectively bringing to the attention of the international community Pakistan's role in sponsoring cross-border terrorism and its attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of India. The international community now openly recognizes Pakistan's state sponsorship of terrorism and the impact this has on the security of the country and the region. Government have also apprised the international community of their firm resolve to take all necessry measures to preserve security and territorial integrity of the country.

Indo-French Forum

2342. SHRI GOVINDRAO ADIK: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a meeting of Indo-French Forum has recently taken place to explore an expansion of trade, cultural educational and other relations;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the measures Government have, so far, take or propose to taken in this regard to strengthen the friendship and co-operation between the two countries and agreements to boost the trade, economy, science and technology co-operation, cultural exchange programme, tourism, agriculture and exports are signed between the two countries?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) Yes, Sir. The fourth meeting of the Indo-French Forum was held in New Delhi on 14 to 18 February 2000 under the co-chairmanship of Shri R.K. Hegde and Mr. Jean Francois-Poncet.